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THE TRANSFORMATION FROM MULTIDISCIPLINARITY TO INTERDISCIPLINARITY: A Case Study of a Course Involving the Status of Arab Citizens of Israel

by

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Abstract: The author demonstrates that entry-level students can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of complex problems through an explicitly interdisciplinary approach than through a merely multidisciplinary approach, using the process described in Repko's (2014) *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies*. Repko takes the interdisciplinary process that is articulated in his earlier volume, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* (2008, 2d ed. 2012), and adapts it for the introductory level. The author uses the example of an introductory Israel Studies course that focuses on the theme of Israel's conflicted identity as a Jewish and democratic state. At an appropriate point in the course, students analyze a case study by the author regarding Jewish marriage in Israel, found in *Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research* (2012), as an illustration of the complete ten-step interdisciplinary research process described in Repko's earlier book, a process best suited for coursework beyond the introductory level. Students then apply Repko's more recent (2014) six-step entry-level broad model of the interdisciplinary process to their own study regarding the status of Arab citizens of Israel.

Keywords: interdisciplinarity, interdisciplinary studies, entry-level interdisciplinary process, interdisciplinary research process, Israel Studies, Arab Israeli, win-win situation

Israel Studies: From Multidisciplinarity to Interdisciplinarity

Multidisciplinary studies and interdisciplinary studies are approaches and processes used to study, analyze, and better understand complex problems. Repko (2008) defines multidisciplinary studies as “merely bringing insights from different disciplines together in some way but failing to engage in the hard work of integration” (p. 346). By contrast, Repko defines interdisciplinary studies as “a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession . . . and [that] draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights to produce a more comprehensive perspective” (p. 344, quoting Klein & Newell, 1997). As Repko further explains, the main difference between multidisciplinary studies and interdisciplinary studies “lies in the mechanism of the research process and the end product” (p. 346).

The interdisciplinary process builds upon but goes well beyond the multidisciplinary process. The distinctions begin with the complexity of the initial research question, the answer to which necessarily calls for a synthesis of the perspectives of multiple disciplines. Repko (2014) identifies three intellectual capacities fundamental to the synthesizing that characterizes interdisciplinary studies: perspective taking, critical thinking, and integration (p. 50). While a multidisciplinary approach considers the perspectives of different disciplines, an interdisciplinary approach uses critical thinking to seek out the interfaces between different disciplines focused on a particular problem so as to allow integration of their perspectives (Repko, 2nd ed., 2012, p. 416, citing Ivanitskaya, et al.). As Klein states, an interdisciplinary approach requires “active triangulation of depth, breadth, and synthesis” (1996, p. 212).

Students relate well to an introduction to the interdisciplinary process through several metaphors presented by Repko (2014) that exemplify the limitations of a merely multidisciplinary approach. The constraints of viewing a problem from the isolated perspectives of different disciplines are effectively illustrated by the story of five professionals (architect, engineer, interior designer, sociologist, and psychologist) who set about to design a house for an elephant. Because each disciplinary expert views the project through his or her own lens and insists on acting accordingly, the resulting house is completely unsatisfactory to the elephant, who moves out in less than six months (pp. 29-30, citing Wheeler & Miller). Another useful metaphor is that of a group of blind men who try to describe an elephant, but

can't because each can only focus on the part he is touching. Similarly, in multidisciplinary work, each disciplinary expert may be dealing with the same problem (here, symbolized by the elephant), yet grasp the problem only from one perspective. This multidisciplinary approach precludes consideration of how different perspectives inter-relate, often with conflicts that need to be resolved in order to allow a more comprehensive understanding (p. 97, citing Saxe). Students may also see in the image of a bowl of fruit how disciplines, in multidisciplinarity, can remain side by side, in physical proximity, but without essential connections being made. By contrast, as Repko notes, interdisciplinarity can be analogized to a smoothie, "finely blended so that the distinctive flavor of each fruit is no longer recognizable, yielding instead the delectable experience of the smoothie" (p. 33, referencing Nissan).

Learning outcomes for entry-level students include exposure to the interdisciplinary process and product elucidated by such metaphors. While students at the introductory level are not equipped to carry out integration themselves, this foundational work readies them for doing so in more advanced courses. And even entry-level students, as Repko affirms, learn much about the interdisciplinary process through thinking about an issue from multiple disciplinary perspectives, making connections that interrelate those perspectives (2014, p. xvii), and through studying material in which others do the same where integration successfully occurs.

The purpose of this article is to provide a model for faculty and students who wish to investigate a truly interdisciplinary process in an introductory level course.¹ The introductory course where I myself apply the interdisciplinary process is a Political Science and Law Department elective, an Israel Studies course that focuses on the theme of Israel's conflicted identity as a Jewish and democratic state.² Students in the class range from sophomores to seniors, but they have generally not had any prior exposure to Israel Studies or to interdisciplinary studies. In earlier iterations of the course I followed an

¹ The model described here is particularly useful in a course where there is a single instructor rather than a team approach. At many institutions, team teaching is not feasible logically or economically, and so the single instructor approach described in this article can have broad applicability for college and university settings (Repko, 2014, p. xvi).

² Prior case studies of interdisciplinary courses have explored the application of the interdisciplinary process to a research methods course, a capstone course, or a graduate program. Manthei and Isler (2011) describe the transformation that occurred in their pedagogy as they developed and co-taught an interdisciplinary upper-division research methods course. The majority of the authors of essays in *Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research* (Repko, Newell, & Szostak, Eds., 2012) elucidate aspects of the practice of integration that are applicable to more advanced courses.

essentially multidisciplinary approach to the subject matter, emphasizing the distinctive contributions of each disciplinary perspective. I made some efforts to introduce the basic framework of the interdisciplinary process, but with limited success since books available to help were designed for students in more advanced courses. Repko's newest book, *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies* (2014), is designed for introductory level students, emphasizing the preparatory steps for a fully interdisciplinary process, including the practice of such techniques as close reading³ and perspective taking.⁴ Repko (2014) describes specific phases required to transform an entry-level multidisciplinary course into an explicitly interdisciplinary course. These phases, reiterated below, guided me in transforming my introductory Israel Studies course from an essentially multidisciplinary one to a more interdisciplinary one.⁵

- Students would be introduced to the interdisciplinary research process and learn that it is an overarching process that does not privilege particular disciplines or their methods;
- Students would be introduced to the concept of disciplinary perspective and learn how to use it to identify disciplines potentially relevant to the problem;
- Students would examine the particular disciplines for their perspective on reality and their assumptions, epistemologies, theories, key concepts and research methods and learn how these influence disciplinary experts' understanding of the problem;
- Students would critically evaluate expert insights and locate their sources of conflict;

³ Close reading is defined by Repko (2008) citing Baldick (2004) as “a fundamental method of modern criticism that calls for the careful analysis of a text and close attention to individual words, syntax, and the order in which sentences and ideas unfold” (p. 303).

⁴ Perspective taking is defined by Repko (2008, citing Baloche, Hynes and Berger) as “viewing a problem, a topic or an artifact from alternative viewpoints--including disciplinary based viewpoints” (p. 56).

⁵ The six “phases” that Repko describes to transform a multidisciplinary course to an explicitly interdisciplinary one should not be confused with the six “steps” of the broad model entry-level interdisciplinary process. The phases deal with overall course structure. The steps deal with approaches to a specific interdisciplinary problem or issue to be studied within the course.

- Students would be introduced to the concept of common ground and learn to use techniques to create it as well as to recognize integrations that are deeply informed by disciplinary expertise;
- Students would be introduced to the concept of interdisciplinary understanding and learn how to recognize understandings that could be evaluated against the specific goal of the interdisciplinary project. (p. 34)

The following sections of this article will explore ways I have transformed my Israel Studies course according to the phases set forth by Repko (2014) above. I describe how my students are introduced to the interdisciplinary research process and learn about the key concepts of common ground and integration by studying the interdisciplinary research process explained in Repko's earlier book (2008) as illustrated through a case study on Jewish marriage in Israel that I wrote for *Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research* (2012). In order to demonstrate how students can apply the entry-level version of the interdisciplinary process, I describe how I guide students to utilize the six steps of the process explained in Repko's newest book (2014) to study the issue that is central to the current version of the course, the status of Israeli Arabs.

Introduction to the Interdisciplinary Research Process

I introduce students to interdisciplinary process in the Israel Studies course in the context of the central theme of the course, an exploration of Israel's conflicted identity as a Jewish and democratic state. How can a state be both Jewish and democratic? Israel is not a theocracy, a state ruled by clerics applying religious law, but neither does it have separation of religion and state. The seemingly contradictory phrase "Jewish and democratic" is at the heart of any consideration of Israel, yet the words "Jewish" and "democratic" often do not easily co-exist. More than sixty years after the creation of the State of Israel, the phrase "Jewish and democratic" continues to defy precise definition.

Israel has been described as both Jewish and democratic ever since its foundational document, the 1948 Proclamation of the State. The Proclamation underscored the "spiritual, religious and national identity" of the Jewish people, tracing their historical foundations to the Bible. The Proclamation declared that the State of Israel would uphold the basic tenets of a democracy (cited in Rabinovich & Reinharz, 2008, p. 72). Students explore questions such as: What does it mean for a non-theocratic state to be Jewish? Can a state maintain itself as a democracy while retaining its

identity as a Jewish state? In the context of the Israel Studies course, such complex issues require examination from multiple perspectives through an interdisciplinary approach (Tayler, 2012, pp. 25-26).

Introduction to the Disciplines and the Concept of Disciplinary Perspective

As Repko (2014) affirms, “the disciplines are themselves the necessary precondition for and foundation of the interdisciplinary enterprise” (p. 28). One of the challenges for my entry-level students is an understanding of the term “discipline.” An effective method of presentation is to focus upon the world view of each of the disciplines essential to the study of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state: political science, law, sociology, and religion.

- “Political science views the world in terms of relationships of power. The perspective of political science provides motivations and explanations for choices made in developing law and policies for the Jewish and democratic State of Israel, whose founding and governing ideology is Secular Zionism” (Tayler, 2012, p. 28). The political perspective offers an understanding of particular aspects of the structure and policies of Israeli institutions of government.
- Law “refers to a set of rules and regulations *and* to the social institution that creates, implements and enforces these rules and regulations” (Barkan, 2009, p. 21). Law is characterized by “socially authorized” external coercive pressure to comply (pp. 24-25). In Israel, law is created by the political branches of government—executive and legislative—as well as by the judicial branch. The legal perspective provides the context for understanding the legal rights and duties of Israeli citizens and the distinctions between Jewish and Arab Israeli citizens.
- “Sociology views the world as a social reality that includes the range and nature of the relationships that exist between the people in any given society. Sociology is particularly interested in voices of the various subcultures, analysis of institutions, and how bureaucracies and vested interests shape life” (Repko, 2014, p. 99). The sociological perspective describes the dynamics of group interactions and relationships, among groups within the Jewish population of Israel as well as between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority.

- “Religion views the world in terms of transcendent beliefs whose source is divine revelation, usually expressed through organized forms of worship. Religion may include laws or guidance governing various aspects of human life, as there is no separation between what is valid for religious life and for human conduct” (Tayler, 2012, p. 28). The perspective of religion⁶ helps to explain the complex interrelationship between religion and state in Israel.

Achieving adequacy in these disciplines relevant to an understanding of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state is the essential precursor to applying the knowledge gained to a focused research question. Since students usually have no prior knowledge of the subject matter for this introductory Israel Studies course, and may have little or no knowledge of the disciplines themselves, they develop the required disciplinary adequacy through course readings that I have preselected in the aforementioned disciplines. Students learn to appreciate that multiple different disciplines are essential to reach understanding of the individual issues considered throughout the course.

One particular challenge in the readings results from the nature of Israel Studies as a multidisciplinary field. As noted above, from the start, it is essential for students to have a firm understanding of what a discipline is so that they can distinguish the perspectives of the different disciplines as they study the subject. While most of the readings emphasize one discipline, some are multidisciplinary. In these latter readings, students have to learn to tease out and distinguish the contributions of individual disciplines before they can engage in perspective taking. Close reading is a particularly important technique for the multidisciplinary readings.

Disciplinary Perspective and Its Applications

At the introductory level, perspective taking is a key differentiating factor between a multidisciplinary approach and an interdisciplinary approach. Repko underscores the centrality of perspective taking, that is to say, “viewing the subject from the perspectives of potentially relevant disciplines” as “a prerequisite for turning multidisciplinary work into interdisciplinary work” (2014, pp. 148-149). He affirms the importance of comparing and contrasting disciplinary perspectives in order to explore the

⁶ The discipline of religious studies has, in recent years, been understood to encompass religion, the theological belief system, as well as the academic study about religion from external perspectives. Using this definition, religion would be considered a subdiscipline of religious studies.

strengths and weaknesses of each perspective (p. 156). Repko emphasizes that disciplinary perspectives are taken on temporarily and are treated as “mere viewpoints” on the way to a more comprehensive understanding (p. 95). In this sense, each perspective is a lens through which students may observe the central issue. However, each perspective provides only a partial view.

Because this is an introductory area studies course, we make do with only the most necessary elements of each discipline relevant to the central issue of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state (concepts, assumptions, epistemologies, theories, and research methods). Throughout the course, we use concepts as the primary tool for the comparison of disciplinary insights. As Klein states: “*Concepts* are powerful sources of cross-fertilization” (1996, p. 50). Klein notes that their retention of disciplinary characteristics causes them to function as ““boundary concepts”” (p. 50). The reliance upon concepts as a basic tool helps the students to closely examine the interrelationships among the identified contributions of each discipline.

Evaluation of Expert Insights and Location of Sources of Conflict

As mentioned previously, in a multidisciplinary area such as Israel Studies, it is not uncommon for a particular reading to include more than one disciplinary perspective. This is especially true of the religious perspective, which is often interwoven into political, legal, and sociological scholarship.

The religious perspective is initially explored by the class through a discussion of the millet system, which was implemented in Palestine during the Ottoman Empire, continued by the British under their Mandate from 1920-1948, and still survives in Israel today. Under this system, each religious group has its own personal status laws (such as those involving marriage and divorce) as well as some degree of autonomy (Tayler, 2012, p.31). Additional religious insights are found within readings in the disciplines of political science, law, and sociology. Students learn that the religious perspective is particularly important in studying the relationship between the Jewish religion and the secular state in Israel as well as in learning about intra-Jewish differences between religious denominations.

The political science perspective is initially explored by the class through study of the governmental structure of Israel. As described in Nachmias (2009), Israel is a representative parliamentary democracy with a multi-party system. The executive, the prime minister, is selected through the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset. No party has ever received a majority in Israeli elections, and so government has always been by coalition. It is

unlawful for anyone who denies the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state, incites to racism, or promotes lack of democracy to mount a party list for the Knesset. This has been an important consideration in the rejection of lists mounted by Arab parties who want to change the nature of the state itself (Peled, 1992).

The legal perspective is initially explored by the class through study of the relationship between religion and state under the millet system. However, what was a Jewish minority during the Ottoman and British regimes is now the majority in the Jewish State of Israel. This changes the dynamic of the application of the millet system to Jews in contemporary Israel. Since Israel does not have separation of religion and state, certain religious practices and laws have been entrenched through legislation. The Rabbinical Court system is a public institution whose structure and jurisdiction are determined by state authority (Edelman, 1994, pp. 52-53, 61).

The sociological perspective is initially explored by the class through study of the two main divisions within Israeli society: differences among Jewish groups and collective differences between Jewish groups and Arab groups. In *Israel's Higher Law* (2006), Mazie probes the roles of religion in a pluralistic democratic state. He considers the Jewish dimensions of state symbols, institutions, and legislation, which constitute official interactions of religion and state (p. 29). To explore these issues, he interviews Jews including haredim (ultra-Orthodox), religious Zionists, secular Jews, and traditional Jews as well as Israeli Arabs. Mazie's interviews reveal disagreements among Israeli Jews with regard to such issues as religious education, marriage law, and military service. They reveal disagreements between Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs with regard to such issues as state symbols and the right to own land. Mazie finds that most Israeli Arabs reject the symbols of a Jewish state as do some liberal Jews. The view of Israeli Arabs is that Israel should be a state of and for all its citizens, which would give Arabs "full equality" (p. 125). Jewish subjects uniformly want to live in some type of Jewish state (p. 127). Mazie concludes that the level of scrutiny of the relationship between religion and state in Israel should be determined by the level of involvement of the government: Non-coercive religious symbols require low-level scrutiny, funding religion by government requires heightened scrutiny, and imposing religion requires strict scrutiny, an almost impossibly high standard to survive (pp. 258-259).

Introduction to the Concept of Common Ground and Recognition of Integration: A Case Study About Jewish Marriage in Israel

After reading literature in the major disciplines of Israel Studies concerned with the question of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state and exploring insights gleaned from each disciplinary perspective in that literature, students are prepared to read and understand an illustration of the ten steps of the complete interdisciplinary research process explained in Repko's earlier book (2008). Students read a chapter that I wrote for *Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research* (2012), where the topic of Jewish marriage in Israel serves as a paradigm for the issues involved in Israel's conflicted nature as a Jewish and democratic state.⁷ By studying and discussing the chapter, students learn to recognize the steps of the complete interdisciplinary research process described in Repko's earlier book and modeled in *Case Studies*, especially the integration phase of the process.⁸

In Step 1 of the interdisciplinary research process described in Repko (2008) and modeled in *Case Studies* (2012), the research question is presented, in this case, "How does the institution of Jewish marriage express Israel's conflicted identity as a Jewish and democratic state?" (Tayler, 2012, p.25) In Step 2 of the process, an interdisciplinary approach to this issue is justified. In Steps 3 and 4 of the process, the relevant disciplines are identified and literature searches are conducted in the disciplines essential, in this case, religion, political science, and law. In Step 5 of the process, adequacy is developed in the relevant aspects of each of the disciplines. Such adequacy is, according to Newell (2006), a basic understanding of how each discipline approaches the research question together with applicable insights based upon theories, concepts, and assumptions (p.253).

Step 6 of the process involves analyzing the problem from the perspective of each of the essential disciplines and evaluating each relevant insight (Repko, 2008, p. 217). Among the insights of religion, in the case under discussion, is Elazar's (1998) theo-political covenant theory, which provides an opening for Orthodox Jews to participate in a dialogue concerning issues

⁷ The Tayler chapter in *Case Studies* rigorously follows the interdisciplinary research process described in the 2008 edition of *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory*, which is the one referenced in this article. The second edition was published in 2012.

⁸ Other chapters in *Case Studies* can also be used as helpful models to demonstrate the complete interdisciplinary process.

of civic engagement (p. 19). Among the insights of law, Barak-Erez's legal pragmatism theory explains the policy of accommodation "in which many legal arrangements reflect pragmatic compromises rather than doctrinal decisions" (2007, p. 118).

Beginning with Step 7, as illustrated in this case study, the students in the entry-level class focus on the second part of the interdisciplinary research process, the integration phase. In Step 7, entry-level students analyzing the *Case Studies* chapter are able to identify the sources of conflicts between insights, especially between the insights of different disciplines. There are conflicts between religion-based insights that validate the exclusive authority of the Orthodox Jewish Rabbinate for Jewish marriage in Israel and civil rights violation insights that result from the imposition of a religious institution as the sole vehicle for Jewish marriage in Israel.

In examining Step 8, as described in the case study, my students learn to recognize techniques for creating common ground among conflicting insights including redefinition, extension, organization, and transformation, described by Newell (2006, pp. 258-260), and theory expansion, described by Repko as being "used to modify a theory so that it can address all of the causation insights pertaining to a problem" (2008, p. 281). Students see that theory expansion provides the best technique for creating common ground with regard to the issue of Jewish marriage. Barak-Erez's theory of legal pragmatism is expanded to include Elazar's covenant theory to engage the Orthodox Jews in the dialogue (Tayler, 2012, p. 45).

In Step 9 of the complete interdisciplinary research process modeled in the *Case Studies* chapter on Jewish marriage, legal pragmatism theory and covenant theory are integrated to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding. The introduction of a civil marriage option is proposed to respect the civil rights of the majority of Israel's citizens. However, in order to offer a win-win situation that takes into account the concerns of Orthodox Jews, it is proposed that civil marriage be an option, not a replacement for the current religious marriage system (Tayler, 2012, p. 47).

In reading this study about Jewish marriage in Israel, my students see how the ten steps of the complete interdisciplinary research process can be applied to analysis of the significant differences among Israeli Jewish groups. They also see that the study concludes with a proposal that the same interdisciplinary process can be applied to a study regarding the status of Israeli Arabs such as they are themselves engaged in. The case study thus serves as a catalyst for students to test their new understanding by applying it to the inequalities confronting the Arab minority as a reflection of Israel's conflicted identity as a Jewish and democratic state. The next step is for me to guide the students further in this inquiry as they apply the entry-level

model of the interdisciplinary process explained in Repko's (2014) newest book.

The Achievement of Interdisciplinary Understanding: Applying the Entry-Level Interdisciplinary Process

Barak-Erez's (2007) work, *Outlawed Pigs: Law, Religion and Culture in Israel*, provides a fitting transition from a study of the differences among groups within the Israeli Jewish population as described in the article about Jewish marriage just discussed (Tayler, 2012) to a study of the differences between Jews and Arabs in Israel. What is most startling to students about Barak-Erez's chronicle of the evolution of laws, practices, and attitudes toward pigs and pork in Israel is the invisibility of the Israeli Arab population. Since most Israeli Arabs are Muslim and have pig and pork prohibitions like those in the Jewish religion, this subject could have provided an opportunity for Jews and Arabs to work together, over the many decades that the issue has been prominent. Yet, because the Jews who are opposed to pig breeding and pork sales have never sought to work with like-minded Israeli Arabs, the Arab citizens of Israel have never been engaged in the issue. Students are guided to question whether this disconnect is symptomatic of the lack of inclusiveness of the Arab minority by the Jewish Israeli population. This leads the class to actively consider the status of Israeli Arabs, the issue to which we are applying the entry-level model of the interdisciplinary process, as described in Part III of Repko's 2014 introductory book.

This process involves six steps that are a distillation of the complete ten-step process described in Repko's earlier book and illustrated in the Jewish marriage article, modified to facilitate their use in an introductory course. The entry-level model emphasizes part one of the interdisciplinary process—the part that precedes the integrative activity best performed by students beyond the introductory level. The six steps represent the application to a particular issue of the overarching activities Repko describes as most useful in transforming a multidisciplinary course into an explicitly interdisciplinary course (p. 34). In the process, described below, students actively participate and contribute through discussion of the readings. They employ tools such as close reading, perspective taking, and critical analysis of disciplinary insights. They come to understand what the interdisciplinary process entails and begin to develop the skills that will enable them to perform the integrative activity with which that process culminates when they move into courses beyond the introductory level.

STEP 1: Define the problem or state the research question.

AND

STEP 2: Justify an interdisciplinary approach.

Israeli Arabs are an ethnic minority composed of the Arab inhabitants of pre-state Palestine who remained in Israel after its establishment as a state in 1948 and their descendants.⁹ As illustrated below, the status of such Arab citizens of Israel is an area ripe for interdisciplinary exploration. I guide the class to follow the progression illustrated in Repko (2014, adapted from Booth, Columb, & Williams) moving from course theme to significance of the research question:

Course theme or subject: Israel's conflicted identity as a Jewish and democratic state.

Specific topic: A study regarding the status of Arab citizens of Israel.

Focused research question: How does the status of Arab citizens of Israel reflect Israel's conflicted identity as a Jewish and democratic state?

Significance of question: To develop a more comprehensive understanding of Israel's conflicted identity as a Jewish and democratic state through a study regarding the status of its Arab minority. (All adapted from Repko, 2014, p. 206)

As in the case of Jewish marriage, an interdisciplinary approach is required to explore how the status of Arab citizens reflects Israel's conflicted identity as a Jewish and democratic state because no single discipline can adequately address the issue.

STEP 3: Identify relevant disciplines.

One discipline that is essential to an understanding of the status of Israeli Arabs is sociology, because the issue concerns ethnic groups within Israeli society. Another essential discipline is law, because the status of Israeli Arabs is governed by law. Hand in hand with law, political science explains the policies behind the development and implementation of relevant laws.

⁹ After the 1967 war, Israel annexed East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Israeli citizenship was offered to the Arab residents of these areas but the vast majority chose to take on only Israeli residence and maintain their pre-1967 citizenship. Israel occupies the West Bank and previously occupied Gaza but has never annexed these areas. Therefore, the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza remain Palestinian citizens and have not been offered Israeli citizenship.

Interestingly, religion is not an essential discipline here. The religious perspective, so vital to a study of the differences among different Jewish groups in Israel, is not essential to a study regarding the status of Israeli Arabs. While most Arabs are Muslim, there are Arabs belonging to Druze, Christian, and other sects. The problem is not specific to a religious sect but rather involves the civil rights of the ethnic Arab minority in a state that self-identifies as Jewish and democratic.

STEP 4: Conduct a literature search.

Through their readings, students glean insights from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. In contextualizing the historical background, students learn that approximately 700,000 Arab inhabitants of pre-state Palestine left the territory from 1947-1949, during the years surrounding the creation of the State of Israel. According to historian Benny Morris (1991), the traditional Arab explanation is that there was a systematic expulsion of Arabs by the Jews; the official Jewish explanation is that the exodus was voluntary, with Arabs lured by external Palestinian and Arab leaders to await an Arab invasion and conquest of Israel. Morris maintains that, in fact, the exodus was complex and multi-staged, with viable explanations on both sides (pp. 42-43). There were approximately 150,000 Arabs who remained in Israel after the establishment of the state (Mautner, 2011, p. 193). Their numbers have grown tenfold, and they now constitute approximately twenty percent of the total population of Israel (Zarchin, 2012). It is these Israeli Arab citizens whose status we explore using the interdisciplinary process.

Virtually all scholars on the subject acknowledge inequalities in the status of Israeli Arabs. The Or Commission was formed to investigate the particularly violent events of October 2000, involving Arab violence and in some cases Arab-Jewish confrontations (Or, 2006). The Or Commission Report states

The Arab citizens of Israel live in a reality in which they experience discrimination as Arabs. This inequality has been documented in a large number of professional surveys and studies, has been confirmed in court judgments and government resolutions, and has also found expression in reports by the state comptroller and in other official documents. Although the Jewish majority's awareness of this discrimination is often quite low, it plays a central role in the sensibilities and attitudes of Arab citizens. (p. 30, citing Report at p.33)

The lack of awareness of or sensitivity to the concerns of Israeli Arabs on the part of Jewish Israelis is found to be an important part of the problem.

Israeli Jewish researchers recommend change within the existing governmental structure. Predictably, some Israeli Arab writers recommend transformation of the essential structure of the state itself, from a Jewish state to “a state of all its citizens” (Mazie, 2006, p. 213). This phrase is code for a binational state with full equality for Jews and Arabs. Gavison recognizes the distinction between making changes to the system and undermining the system itself. She asserts

It is justified and right that Israel should retain an element of Jewish distinctiveness as part of its meta-purpose. At the same time, the state must take action, at both the declarative and practical levels, to strengthen the common civic identity of all its inhabitants and to deepen their sense of membership and common enterprise. (2007, p. 42)

Students in the class learn that Israeli Arabs have the basic rights of citizenship, such as voting and representation. They have freedom of religion, and Arabic is a second official language in Israel. However, the vast majority of Arabs cannot exercise the civic duties of full citizens, such as serving in the armed forces. They are therefore not eligible for benefits that are available to citizens who have served in the military. Israeli Arabs see themselves as alienated from the government and discriminated against in areas such as education, employment, land ownership, and housing (Rudoren, 2012). The Lapid Commission, in reviewing the implementation of government plans and resolutions in the Arab sector, found that there are also inequities in levels of municipal service, industrial development, and representation of the population “in the civil service and on the boards of directors of government-owned companies” (Or, 2006, citing Lapid Commission findings, p. 34).

Students relate their readings about the status of Israeli Arabs to their earlier readings in Mazie’s *Israel’s Higher Law* (2006), recalling that Israeli Arabs live in a state filled with Jewish symbols in the public sphere, such as a flag whose centerpiece is a Jewish star and a national anthem that speaks of the yearnings of the Jewish soul. From the Israeli Arab perspective, Israel’s celebratory Independence Day is marked as the Naqba or catastrophe, mourning the loss of Arab lands to the Jews of Israel. From the Jewish perspective, many Israeli Jews see Israeli Arabs as a security risk and a potential fifth column, because of their divided allegiance to Palestinian brethren in neighboring countries.

STEP 5: Critically analyze the disciplinary insights into the problem and locate the sources of conflict.

Through their readings, students learn that the situation of Israel's Arab minority has evolved over time since the establishment of the State of Israel. The class uses the technique of perspective taking to study the assigned readings. Students temporarily take on the perspective of the academic discipline of each author, while we emphasize that each disciplinary perspective is partial. They are taught to recognize personal as well as disciplinary biases of the authors. Two difficulties that students experience are a reluctance to relinquish a disciplinary perspective and a concomitant encroachment of personal bias and/or disciplinary bias. I may then ask one student to re-state the position of another student, and frequently the first student can see the limitations in his or her position when it is mirrored by another student. It is challenging to remind students that their perspective taking is both temporary and partial.

The following paragraphs set forth some of the key insights regarding the situation of Israeli Arabs that students glean from close reading of scholarly sources emphasizing the essential political, legal, and sociological perspectives. As noted previously, due to the multidisciplinary nature of Israel Studies, certain readings encompass more than one perspective.

Rekhess, writing from the political perspective in his book *The Arab Minority in Israel: An Analysis of the "Future Vision" Documents* (2008), distinguishes three phases in the relationship between the Jewish and Arab populations of Israel. Rekhess denotes the first phase, from 1948-67, "accommodation" or "Israelization." It was marked by efforts toward Arab integration into Israeli society. According to Peled in "Ethnic Democracy and the Legal Construction of Citizenship: Arab Citizens of the Jewish State" (1992), during this period, security concerns arose about Israeli Arabs as a potential fifth column, and military law was imposed in areas of dense Arab population. There were, however, improvements in Arab standards of living as well as socioeconomic growth. Rekhess (2008) denotes the second phase, from 1967-93, "Palestinization." As a result of the Israeli conquest of neighboring territories in the West Bank in 1967 and the beginning of peace negotiations with Egypt in 1977 leading to the establishment of relations between the two countries, Israeli Arabs had free access to neighboring Arab populations for the first time since 1948. This resulted in increased Arab nationalism and political activism. Rekhess (2008) denotes the third phase, from 1993-2006, "localization," in which the Israeli Arabs realized that they were essentially alone and that the two-state solution of creating a Palestinian state would not fulfill the needs of Arab

Israelis, who, overwhelmingly, did not want to leave Israel. It was also a period that included several violent confrontations among demonstrators within the Arab community and in some cases Arab-Jewish confrontations, particularly the violent demonstration in 2000. This evidence of increasing frustration and tension in the Arab sector prompted the creation of the Lapid Commission to investigate the situation of Israeli Arabs and the Or Commission to investigate the violence in the Israeli Arab sector (Or, 2006).

In 2006-2007, a group of Israeli Arab intellectuals developed a series of position papers called the “Future Vision Documents.” In these documents, students comprehend, from the Arab perspective, a growing sense of exclusion from the political dialogue of Israel and a growing awareness of socioeconomic gaps vis-à-vis the Jewish population of Israel. Students observe that, according to Rekhess, from the perspective of Jewish commentators on the “Future Vision Documents,” the position papers amounted to “delegitimization” of the Jewish state in favor of a consociational binational state where Jews and Arabs would share power (pp. 23-24). Rekhess concludes that, within the Jewish and democratic state of Israel, “a revised framework for minority-majority relations must be devised, and an integrated model based on equality, coexistence, tolerance and mutual respect must be developed” (p. 26). Students are able to see that differing disciplinary perspectives and ethnic biases inform the positions of scholars who study the status of the Arab minority in Israeli democracy.

In an examination of Israel as a democracy, students find in Dahl’s *On Democracy* (2000) that criteria for a democratic state are useful to consider. The criteria include “effective participation, equality in voting, gaining enlightened understanding, exercising control over the agenda and inclusion of adults” (pp. 38, 85). According to Dahl, cultural diversity and cultural conflicts provide challenges within a democracy, but they are manageable where other conditions for democracy are present (pp. 149-151, 183-185). Yet, as Mautner observes in *Law and the Culture of Israel*, Arab citizens are “excluded from participation in significant political decisions, most notably those having to do with Israel’s defense and foreign relations--talk about the need for ‘a Jewish majority’ as a precondition for the legitimacy of such decisions is often heard in Israel” (2012, p. 198).

In “Ethnic Democracy: Israel as Archetype” author Smooha states that Israel is an “ethnic democracy,” where “the dominance of the majority group is institutionalized alongside democratic procedures” (1997, p. 233). Smooha, a sociologist specializing in comparative ethnic relations, points to areas where the Arab Israeli minority is disadvantaged, such as symbols and language in the public sphere, as well as “equality of rights and duties, the kind of collective rights extended to the minority, and the opening of the

national power structure for the minority” (p. 234). Smooha views the ability to use the democratic process to effectuate reform as the test of whether an ethnic democracy is truly a democracy. In Smooha’s characterization, Israel is the archetype of ethnic democracy, and Arab Israelis can work to effectuate change from within the structure of the state.

In their “Questioning ‘Ethnic Democracy’: A Response to Sammy Smooha” (1998), Ghanem, Rouhana, and Yiftachel study Israel as an ethnic state from the perspective of political science. In their response to Smooha, the authors “question the credibility of including in one term (‘ethnic democracy’) two opposing principles of political organization: the ‘ethnos’ (selective association by origin) and the ‘demos’ (inclusive association by residence or citizenship)” (p. 264). Ghanem, Rouhana, and Yiftachel acknowledge that the Israeli system possesses some of the “features” of a democracy but deny that it has the “structures” of a democracy, since the state “is premised on a rigid ethnic hierarchy” (p. 265). They contend that Israel “breaches a fundamental principle of democratic rule, the protection of minorities” (p. 258), by marginalizing its Arab citizens. While they acknowledge that the status of Israeli Arabs has been improving, they assert that the improvements do not change the basic ethnocratic nature of the regime (p. 265). The authors extend their critique of Smooha’s contradictory term “ethnic democracy” to a critique of the entire edifice upon which Israel’s government is built.

Using close reading, students can discern that Smooha’s reference to “democratic procedures” for the minority (1997, p. 233) is comparable to Ghanem, Rouhana, and Yiftachel’s use of “structures” of a democracy (1998, p. 265), in that both refer to the framework upon which democracy is constructed. Smooha is referring to the improvement of democratic procedures by working within the current framework of the state, while Ghanem, Rouhana, and Yiftachel are talking about changing the structure of the state itself so that it will no longer be a Jewish state.

Peled (1992), citing Smooha’s 1990 work on Israel as an ethnic democracy (p. 432), argues, from the perspective of political science, that the dichotomous view of Israel as an ethnic democracy does not take into account the codification of Arab rights by legislation and judicial opinions during the 1980s. He suggests that there are two types of citizenship in Israel, liberal and republican (p. 432). Liberal citizenship, which is descriptive of Israeli Arabs, is a truncated form of passive citizenship, which has the status of citizenship and the entitlement to certain rights; it prioritizes right over good. Republican citizenship, on the other hand, which is descriptive of Israeli Jews, includes rights and duties, that is to say, the experience of active participation in the practice of citizenship;

this shared moral purpose prioritizes good over right (p. 433). Peled sees limits to the possibilities for Israeli Arabs so long as they are limited to liberal citizenship. However, like Smooha, he also argues that the liberal citizenship status of Israeli Arabs allows them “to conduct their struggle within the constitutional framework of the state, rather than against it” (p. 440).

Smooha, on the other hand, argues that “liberal democracy is neither realistic nor popular,” concluding from his surveys of Israeli Jews and Arabs that the broadest consensus supports “a variant of ethnic democracy, incorporating elements of consociational democracy” (1998, p. 233). Yet he concedes that consociational democracy, a binational state of Jews and Arabs, “the solution preferred by Arabs . . . raises the sharpest opposition among Jews” (p. 233).

Students discover another view of this issue in the Israeli Arabs’ call for recognition as a national or indigenous minority (Rekhess, 2007, pp. 9, 28). The designation as an indigenous minority, similar to the status of Native Americans and Inuits in the United States, would bring with it the potential for increased rights, compensation, and considerations that are not available to immigrant minorities. Or (2006), also from the legal perspective, reflects upon the causes and consequences of the violent confrontations involving the Israeli Arab population in 2000. He states that “the granting of equal rights to a minority population is not an act of kindness bestowed by the majority. These rights are granted under the principle of equality, which constitutes part of the law of the land: All are equal before the law” (p. 33).

In the early years of the State of Israel, during the period termed “Israelization” by Rekhess (2008), many Arabs felt that their interests were served by the Zionist parties and so they voted with the Zionist parties (p. 3). In the 1980s, Israeli Arabs tried to form a joint Arab-Jewish party, the Progressive List Party, but the party was ultimately disqualified from fielding a list of candidates for Israeli Knesset elections because “this list believes in principles that endanger the [territorial] integrity and existence of the State of Israel, and [the] preservation of its distinctiveness as a Jewish state” (cited in Peled, 1992, p. 437). Since that time, the number of Arab voters in elections has been steadily decreasing. The rights of liberal citizenship, as described by Peled (1992), are not being fully exercised by Israeli Arab citizens, as a result of disillusionment with the system. Rekhess notes that only 56.3% of all eligible Arabs voted in the 2006 elections, a drop of 21% compared to the 1996 elections (2008, p. 11). Rekhess recommends promoting civic equality for Israeli Arabs, including the adequate representation of Arabs in senior positions in the government, acknowledging that the present situation “has now escalated into a serious

challenge to Israel's national identity" (p. 29).

As the class move through Step 5 of the entry-level model of the interdisciplinary process, students critically analyze the disciplinary insights into the problem just reviewed and locate the sources of conflict; the historical evolution of the status of Israeli Arabs over the years of the existence of the State of Israel provides the background for students to understand the political, legal, and sociological perspectives on the issue. Students are able to observe conflicts in views both within disciplines and between disciplines. It then becomes apparent that, although virtually all scholars recognize the existence of inequities and the need for amelioration, they differ as to the means and the feasibility of achieving it.

STEP 6: Reflect on how the interdisciplinary process has enlarged your understanding of the problem.

As explained above, in this Israel Studies course, students are introduced to integration as the culmination of the complete ten-step interdisciplinary research process described in Repko's earlier book by studying Tayler's (2012) article regarding Jewish marriage in Israel. They apply Repko's (2014) six-step entry-level version of the process to the status of Israeli Arabs by critically evaluating multiple disciplinary insights into that situation (p. 256). Repko states that the preparatory work of the first five steps of the entry-level version of the interdisciplinary process itself constitutes an important cognitive advancement because "First, it reveals the essential disciplinary *content* of the problem. Second, it introduces the research *process* used. . . . Third, it informs us about the power of *perspective taking* (both disciplinary and interdisciplinary). Fourth, it amounts to consciously taking concrete steps that move us toward creating common ground and performing integration" (p. 258).¹⁰

In making the cognitive advancement toward a more comprehensive understanding, students engage in perspective taking as they contrast the issue of Jewish marriage with the issue of the status of Israeli Arabs. Students are able to see the contradictions in the perspectives of civil rights advocates, which differ with regard to these two issues. On the one hand, the progressive voices of civil rights advocates strongly support civil marriage in Israel as a solution to the injustice of a society that has no legal mechanism for marriage between those who do not want an Orthodox Jewish wedding. On the other

¹⁰ Repko (2014) provides an instructor version of the rubric for the six steps of the broad model entry-level interdisciplinary process. The rubric includes helpful criteria for evaluating student accomplishment of each step (pp. 293-295).

hand, many civil rights advocates do not believe that the same unfettered liberties should apply to the citizenship rights of Israeli Arabs. They have their reasons—such as viewing the Arab population as security risks or seeing equal status for Arab Israelis as a danger to Israel as a Jewish state—but the contradiction remains. It is challenging to get students to see past their own biases to become aware of the contradictions between these positions.

As Or (2006) observes, the Jewish majority's awareness of the discrimination against Israeli Arabs is “often quite low” (p. 30 citing p. 33 of Report). Mautner states that “Israeli Arabs’ opposition to the definition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, their exclusion from important political decisions, the discrimination they suffer and their absence from mainstream civil society are all seldom discussed in Israel’s political and public discourses” (2011, p. 199). Awareness of the status of Arab Israelis as a civil rights issue is a first step toward creating a win-win situation such as might emerge from the integration of insights from the different disciplinary perspectives that can be brought to bear upon it.

Grappling with such complexity, students are encouraged to view democracy as an ideal, and as such not fully attainable in practice (Gavison, 2007, p. 98). Israel, thus viewed, is an imperfect yet evolving democracy. Students compare the civil rights struggle of Israeli Arabs to the civil rights struggle of African Americans in the United States, in terms of the evolution toward equal rights for minorities. During the period of slavery in the United States, the effort to initiate change by changing the entire system resulted in the Civil War and came close to destroying the nation. Subsequent progress toward civil rights in the United States has taken place within the democratic structure.

Though American democracy continues to struggle with issues of equality more than 220 years after its founding, it is still denominated as a democracy. In *Jews in Israel: Contemporary Social and Cultural Patterns*, Rehbun and Waxman point this out, stating “in the treatment of its Arab citizens, Israel’s democracy is flawed, just as racism is a blight on American democracy. . . . For many, Zionism has not yet fully achieved its mission and will not do so until Israel becomes a fully developed Jewish democracy” (2004, p. 472). Students grapple with the analogies between the situation of Israeli Arabs and the struggle for civil rights in the United States. Students understand that, for Israel, the pressures of hostile neighboring Arab states and a potential fifth column of Israeli Arabs within the country complicate the analogy.

In moving toward understanding of what a win-win situation might be through the interdisciplinary process, the class accepts the description of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state characterized by an institutionalized majority and an indigenous minority whose rights must be preserved

and protected. Gavison (2007) suggests that “Israeliness,” the common citizenship and culture of Jews and non-Jews, holds the promise of a kind of secular unity that can more fully integrate the Arab population. This would require change in the current self-identification of “Jewishness” in the national culture to a self-identification of “Israeliness” (p. 91). Such an evolution in thinking may be one starting point for change to occur within the structure of the existing democracy, but it requires the kind of good will between the parties that has not been fostered in the past.

The Or Commission concludes

Coexistence is not easily achieved. . . . The Arab citizens must bear in mind that Israel constitutes the realization of the Jewish people’s dreams for a state of its own, a state where Jews are the majority, and a state founded on the principle of ingathering of the exiles - and that is the very essence of the state’s significance for its Jewish citizens. . . . The Jewish majority must bear in mind that the state is not only a Jewish state, but a democratic one and . . . equality is one of the central bricks in the state’s constitutional structure, and the proscription against discrimination applies to all its citizens. The Jewish majority must understand that the events that transformed the Arabs into a minority in this state constituted a national catastrophe for them, and that their integration into the State of Israel involves painful sacrifices on their part. (Or, 2006, p. 52 citing Report at pp. 779-780)

Through critical reflection, students come to understand that a win-win situation is only likely if Israeli Jews become more aware of and sensitive to the inequities faced by Israeli Arabs, recognize their special status as an indigenous minority, and provide mechanisms for them to participate more fully as citizens of Israel. Israeli Arabs would also need to pursue their quest for equality within the structure of the Jewish and democratic State of Israel. The layers of mutual mistrust and insensitivity must begin to disappear if there is to be progress. Or (2006, p. 32) alludes to a limited window of opportunity. A more comprehensive understanding demonstrates that both sides need to take advantage of the existing possibilities.

Conclusion

Repko’s (2014) *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies* has provided a model for applying the interdisciplinary process at the entry level to transform

a previously multidisciplinary Israel Studies course into an explicitly interdisciplinary one. Repko affirms the importance of critical reflection in the interdisciplinary research process (p. 42). It is that critical reflection which leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the problem. To use an analogy referenced by Repko, the process that moves students towards such understanding transforms the bowl of fruit (multidisciplinarity) into a smoothie (interdisciplinarity) (pp. 32-33).

Through the interdisciplinary process, students in the course gain a more comprehensive understanding of Israel's conflicted identity as a Jewish and democratic state by studying the illustrative paradigm provided by the study of Jewish marriage in *Case Studies* (2012) and by actively carrying out the entry-level steps elucidated by Repko (2014) in studying the status of Arab citizens of Israel. The interdisciplinary skills and knowledge that students develop in this entry-level course will prepare them to perform integration when they move into more advanced courses where they will be challenged to undertake fully integrative interdisciplinary work.

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